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## **Authenticity versus autonomy: the synthesis of World Englishes as a discipline**

**Philip Seargeant**, *Exploring World Englishes: Language in a Global Context*. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2012. Pp. xi + 218. Paperback £24.99, ISBN 978-415-57210-1

Reviewed by Claire Cowie, University of Edinburgh

World Englishes, like other topics covered in the Routledge Introduction to Applied Linguistics series (ELT, Classroom Discourse, Corpus Linguistics), is increasingly a feature of the curriculum of Applied Linguistics and TESOL programmes. Philip Seargeant's book is aimed at masters-level students who are teachers in training or language professionals returning to study, and final year undergraduates. The first part of the book is what you would expect: everything applied linguistics students need to know about WES (World English Studies). The second part is a meditation on WES as academic discipline which is likely to provide food for thought for researchers as well as students.

Fortunately the long tradition of undergraduate textbooks which offer region-by-region descriptions of English is on the wane. More recent textbooks such as Jenkins (2003) and Schneider (2011), and the more advanced Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), whilst individually reflecting the preoccupations of their authors, all address the twin strands of World Englishes. These are, on the one hand, variation which has emerged over time through the dynamics of language contact, and on the other, the global character of English, which now sets it apart from the study of other languages. This, for Seargeant, is a paradox at the heart of WES: English is celebrated around the world for the way it can express the identity of particular communities (authenticity) but also for its universality and neutrality (anonymity).

The series format requires the author to address real world problems, and these are set out in the fourth chapter of Part 1 Section A (Problems and Contexts). The central questions for English teachers (What variety of English should be taught? Who should teach English? How should English be tested?) are introduced in a fresh and direct manner, as universal concerns. Their treatment in the WES literature emerges in subsequent chapters.

To arrive at this point however Seargeant has to gallop through the "Contexts" of the section title: the second chapter illustrates diversity in contemporary Englishes and communication; the third is a history of English starting with the Anglo-Saxons. Throughout, there is no assumption of a background in linguistics. More general terms such as dialect, variation, standard are introduced, and special attention is paid to concepts like "intelligibility", and "native speaker".

In Section B (Interventions) we see how the idea of English as an international language is prefigured by movements for artificial, auxiliary or simplified languages (Chapter 6 "the global language paradigm"). Chapter 7 (Codification and legitimation) shows how corpora, which may be developed by linguists interested in variation, can be used to inform decisions about teaching and testing practices. National dictionary projects too

become validations of new Englishes. At this point Seargeant turns to the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) movement as a specific answer to the questions posed in chapter 4: the variety taught does not have to be native, neither does the teacher, and neither does the variety examined; as is commonly still the case in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Seargeant might be more sceptical about claims that ELF is demonstrating interlanguage in the manner of indigenised Englishes – the evidence is sparse and it's not clear what an interlanguage for such a diverse range of speakers and contexts would look like.

The last chapter on Interventions (8 Policies and cultural practices) presents the Speak Good English Movement in Singapore as a now well-known policy *against* a World English. Seargeant draws on his own recent work (Erling and Seargeant 2013) to explore some less well-known interventions, namely attempts to promote English in international development aid programmes, the success of which is debatable. There is an up-to-date discussion of language rights within the EU, and the rights of linguistic minorities worldwide. We see how “killer English” arguments are often oversimplified: indigenous languages can be more threatened by other supra-local languages; in some cases English is appropriated by marginalised groups as a response to a dominant local culture and language.

Part II (World Englishes as an academic discipline) rightly identifies Braj Kachru as a sociolinguist and a founder of WES. The main contribution for Seargeant, however, of Kachru's famous Three Circles model, is not its description of variation, but its shift away from English as a single homogenous entity and its legitimisation of non-native varieties of English. Kachru's position is most famously set out in his 1990–91 exchange with Randolph Quirk in this journal, where Quirk argued that Kachru's outer circle non-native varieties should not be held up as models for teaching. This debate is so often cited now that Quirk's role as a pioneer of empirical linguistics through the Survey of English Usage (also described in this book) pales into insignificance. Kachru's project steadily gained influence and what started as an academic perspective has now been disseminated into teacher training courses and language planning initiatives.

Now, as Kachru would agree, the circles need to be much more fluid. An alternative model gaining ground outlined in this section is Schneider's Dynamic Model, where territories can be at different stages depending on level of contact (i.e. external events). Stage in turn determines norm orientation, identity formation, and pattern of variation, obviating the need for category distinctions such as native and non-native.

WES as a discipline is a follower of fashion, and in addition to descriptive sociolinguistics draws on “critical theory–influenced anthropological examinations of situated language use” (178). The latter is a reference to more recent notions in globalisation theory such as Roland Robertson's glocalisation and Arjun Appadurai's global flows, which have been enthusiastically taken up by figures such as Alistair Pennycook

(2007) and Jan Blommaert (2010). They are in part a response to Marxist frameworks such as Robert Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992) in which the powerful centre will always dominate the periphery.

Seargeant is clear that this is not a sociolinguistic study and that he will not therefore offer an account of the variation associated with WES (64). The downside of this is that students of applied linguistics (who often take courses in Second Language Acquisition) may not appreciate that a major research agenda of WES in linguistics is to better understand the nature of transfer, especially in the case of multiple substrates (for example Bao 2005, Sharma 2009). Transfer then interacts with norm orientation (Gut 2007).

Seargeant appreciates (following Mufwene 2001) that "creoles" may not be distinguished from World Englishes on a linguistic basis, and notes that World Englishes handbooks follow different practices in including or excluding creoles. But more fundamentally, WES is the child of creolistics. Platt Weber and Ho's (1984) work on New Englishes emerged in parallel with Kachru's early work on Indian English.

Readers of Part II are likely to need a degree or other experience which encourages critical engagement with the way academic knowledge is packaged and delivered. Nevertheless Seargeant carefully explains how academic disciplines are formed, and provides a final chapter showing how labels are assigned in WES. I would definitely recommend this highly readable book to my final year linguistics students.

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